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ABSTRACT

The human geography of Alaska is as diverse as its climate and topography, and 20 native groups, all of them with their own languages and cultural history, as well as many isolated areas. The Battle of the Books, an English-as-a-Second-Language competitive reading program, has been successful in Alaska because through it, diverse people and entire villages have finally been able to communicate with each other via the teleconferencing of the contest. The program began in Chicago in the 1940s and was eventually brought to Kodiak Island and developed into a statewide effort. Originally, the Kodiak Island contest was intended to promote reading among low socioeconomic group students and link villages through a teleconferencing network. The contest consists of teams of readers grouped by reading level whose task is to read a predetermined number of books in a specific time period. Teams meeting the contest deadline may then compete with each other. Preparation for the competition is extensive, involving enriched instruction, literacy activities that extend the school day to the home environment, which is often literacy-poor. The only problem has been obtaining commitment to the program as a literacy immersion activity institutionalized in the schools. Contest rules and guidelines and a 35-item bibliography are included. (MSE)

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BATTLE OF THE BOOKS ALASKA STYLE

A DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM AND ITS ORIGIN

By: Jim Moras

While traveling "outside" of Alaska, I often get into conversations with people who inevitably ask: "What's it like in Alaska?" Needless to say, that questions is a very difficult one to answer because there are so many Alaskans. For instance, the physical geography of Alaska is composed of more square miles than most countries contain. The State is 1200 miles from North to South, and that is equal to the distance from Boston, MA to Columbus, GA. One need only to contemplate the differences in climate that exists between these two American cities to get an appreciation for the many climates of Alaska. Climates that range from the year-round chill of Barrow to the year-round temperate climate of Southeast Alaska which has a climate much like Seattle's. In addition to great differences in climate, the topography of the land exhibits tremendous variation, ranging from the flat tundra areas of western and northern Alaska, to the majestic peaks of the Alaska range which include some of the highest peaks in North America. Denali (the great one in Native Athabaskan) at 20,000 plus feet, is the highest peak on the continent.

The human geography of Alaska is about as diverse as its climate and topography. Twenty Native groups live in state, all of them with their own languages and cultural history. These Native people have lived in their particular locations for thousands of years; and these locations range from the Aleutian Islands to the southwest, to Saint Lawrence Island near the Russian Coast, north to Barrow, the most northerly settlement in the United States, and to ketchikan in the southeast. The

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diversity and isolation of the state is the reason that the Battle of the Books program has been so successful in Alaska, because it is through this program that diverse people and entire villages, villages that have been in existence for thousands of years, were finally able to communicate with each other via the teleconferencing of the Battle of the Books contest. In many of these villages, teleconferencing equipment was used for the first time to accommodate this contest, the technology being experimental in nature.

The Battle of the books program had its start in the 1940's as a radio program (Kirby, 1988) in Chicago. This program, which was sponsored by the Chicago Public Library, was started as a way of getting young people involved with reading. One participant, Joanne Kelly, grew up to be a librarian working in Urbana, Illinois. She adapted the idea, and used it with her students. Eventually some of her ideas made their way to Kodiak Island; a place isolated even by Alaska standards. Eventually, with the help of Kodiak School District, the Battle of the Books became a state-wide contest.

The original contest as conducted by the Kodiak Island School District, was an attempt to both promote reading among its low SES student population, and link the isolated villages of the island via a teleconferencing network. The contest itself, consists of teams of readers that are grouped into various reading levels, and whose task is to read a pre-determined number of books in a pre-determined time period. The teams that meet the contest deadlines are eligible to "battle" ion the contest. (see appendix 1, which have been modified to meet the needs of Southwest Region Schools)

Preparation for the book battles is extensive, and involves what Beck (et al 1987) has labeled rich/extended instruction, and also includes a web of literacy activities that tend to extend the child's school day to the home environment. The Battle of the Books program is very similar to a program run on Fiji (Book Flood, Elley-Manghubhi, 1983) that was also meant to build reading enthusiasm and fluency among students studying English as a second language.

The use of literature, as a program of individualized reading in grades 4-12, used to bring about enthusiasm and fluency in readers, is not a new idea though, and has been around for many decades (Fader, 1976; Tunnel et.al, 1989; Eldridge et.al., 1986; Davis et.al., 1971; Allington, 1977; Fielding etal., 1984; White et.al., 1986; Koeller, 1981; Chall, 1983; and many others).

Such a program in rural Alaska is particularly important to implement, because many of the students come from literacy poor home environments and the only chance that many of these students will get in terms of developing a love of reading will be in the school environment. In addition to this, only about ten percent of the rural students go on to any form of higher education, so for these students, literacy can be explained in terms of reading at the ultimate free time, leisure, and power enhancing activity (Smith, 1989).

The only drawback to the implementation of the Battle of the Books program has been garnishing a commitment to the program as a literacy immersion activity. Staff in some cases are reluctant to get involved with the contest because as a rich/extended learning activity, the school must be restructured around the contest, a contest which can last up to an entire school year.

For low SES students this restructuring is ideal though, because the contest provides for an immersion in literacy activities; and I suspect that over a period of time, this immersion could lead to high increases in reading comprehension and vocabulary growth. I have not documented this through (grades 4-12), because in schools that I have worked in, I have not been successful in getting this activity raised to the immersion level, which means devoting three hours per school day to the contest, and teaching most language arts and other content area subjects through the reading necessary for the contest.

In my opinion, not only could this immersion move students rapidly through the stages of reading (Chall, 1983) but could also make the target of making adept readers (Carroll, 1987) of all participants a reality. More research on these possibilities needs to be conducted.

RULES: BATTLE OF THE BOOKS

1. Each team will consist of three players. A fourth person should be assigned to each team as an alternate.

2. Each team will have a chance to answer an equal amount of questions.

3. Points are scored for each correct title; additional points are scored for each correct author.

4. A team can answer a question only when the question is directed to that team.

5. Each team will select a spokesperson who will give the answers for team members.

6. The team must give their answer within the 30 second time limit.

7. A half-time score will be announced after five questions have been given to each team. After ten questions, the final score will be announced and a winner declared.

8. In the event of the tie score, another round will be played, consisting of ten questions per school. Should a tie still exist after the second round a "sudden death" on the questions will occur.

9. Should a team wish to challenge the questioner or the timer during a battle, the spokesperson must call for a "Time Out" immediately following the action wishing to be challenged. During the time out, the team will meet with its coach to discuss the problem or concern. If a formal complaint is made, the judge(s) assigned to the battle will make a final decision and the battle will resume.

10. Audience members will refrain from showing partiality to any particular team.

Alaska Rules

1. Each team member will consist of three players. A fourth person should be assigned to each team to serve as an alternate. Team members may change during the course of the Battle of the Books program, however, teams must remain the same once district battles begin. if a team is comprised of members from more than one grade level, the team will compete in district and state battles at the highest grade represented. (It is recommended that students participate on grade level t prevent duplicate exposure to questions as titles are repeated a two-year intervals.)

2. Each team will have a chance to answer 10 questions. Someone will ask the questions, someone will keep score, someone will serve as timekeeper, and someone will serve as judge. During any audio conference battles there will be a timekeeper at the site asking the question and at the site receiving the questions.

3. Each team will have 30 seconds to answer a question. Five (5) points will be scored for each correct book title. Three (3) bonus points will be scored for each correct author. The author's first, middle and last name or initial as indicated on the bottom of the question (this has been designated the OFFICIAL AUTHOR/TITLE). Both the title and author must be given within the 30 second time limit. A team cannot earn 3 bonus points for the author's name unless the title has been stated correctly. Initial articles in titles will be disregarded whether correctly or incorrectly stated. During all battles the timing will begin as soon as the questions is asked. If, during audio conference battles, the receiving end does not hear the question due to line interference, the timer at the receiving end must IMMEDIATELY request that same question be repeated.

4. A team can answer a question only when that question is directed to that team. If the wrong team answers the question or if someone from the audience shouts out an answer, that question will be eliminated and replaced with another question.

5. Each team will select a spokesperson who will give the answers for the team. Team members should confer before the spokesperson responds, but only the spokesperson will give the answer. Once the spokesperson begins to respond with a title, it is that title which will be accepted as the response.

6. If a team does not answer its question correctly within the 30 second time limit, the answer to that question will be stated by the questioner. No points for that question will be scored by either team. The other team will receive the next new question.

7. A half-time score will be announced after 5 questions have been given to each team. After 10 questions, the final score will be announced and a winner declared.

8. In the event of a tie score, complete rounds of tie-breaker questions (consisting of one question per team) will be asked until one team has a higher score at the end of a complete round. Teams must respond within 10 seconds to tie-breaker questions, but a team will be allowed to continue a response begun prior to the time being called. (e.g. If one team responds, "James and the ..." and then time is called, they will be allowed to continue, "...Giant Peach by Ronald Dahl." They will then be given the full 8 points. However, if they responder says "James and the Giant Peach," --then pauses, long enough for the judge to determine that there is uncertainty concerning the author, then respond --"by Ronald Dahl," only 5 points for the title would be given.)

9. Should a team wish to challenge either the questioner or the timer during a battle, the spokesperson must call for a "TIME OUT" immediately following the action wishing to be challenged. During the time out, the team will meet with its "coach" to discuss the problem or concern. A formal complaint will be stated by the "coach". The judge assigned to the battle will hear the complaint, confer with the appropriate scorer, timekeeper, and/or questioner and make a decision. The judge's decision is FINAL and once stated, the battle will resume.

10. During the district and state audio conference battles, 2 sites will participate with teams and a third site will be responsible for asking questions and providing a judge, scorer, and timer. Scorers and timers should also be provided at the sites of the two teams being asked questions.

Setting Up The Program

In the spring the school district coordinator begins to form committees to select books for the following year. Committees are made up of 4-6 members from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines (parents, teachers, principals, coordinators) and are appointed, elected or volunteer to serve on committee. Committees for four levels of book selection are formed. Students in grades three and four form one group; students in grades five and six another, seventh and eighth grade a third group and the high school committee is the last group formed.

Committee members for each age level must be selected at least one month before the first age level committee meeting. This is so, in order for each committee member to select 5 books which he/she feels should be included on next year's list. With six committee members each selecting 5 books for possible selection, the committee will have 30 books from which to select 13 to 15 for the competition.

It addition to bringing copies of the books to the selection meetings, each committee member should bring a short book review or summary of each of the five works that he/she would like to see reviewed for selection. A chairperson for each group should be appointed or elected by the group and he/she should be responsible for final book selection. The chairperson is only allowed to select two of his or her own suggested selections. When considering book selection, variety price, and literary merit are things to consider.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING TITLES FOR THE OFFICIAL BOOKLIST

1. Number of books:

   3/4 - 15 titles

   5/6 - 15 titles

   7/8 - 15 titles

   9+ - 12 titles

2. Grade level/reading level:

   50% on grade/reading level, 25% above, 25% below

3. Interest level:

   consider a variety of subject areas, plots, settings and styles

   equal number of books for boys and girls

   consider adventures stories, animal stories, popular realistic fiction, fantasy, science fiction, biography, historical fiction, minority group representation, Alaskan, folk literature, classics, translated foreign works.

4. Quality of books:

select quality, well-reviewed titles that are popular and will "stand the test of time" award winners - Newberry, Young Reader's Choice, etc.

5. Books on previous lists:

25% of the titles must be those used a minimum of two years previous to the current year; with the exception that high school titles not be repeated for four years.

6. Availability of books:

books should currently be available in paperback format

check PAPERBACK BOOKS IN PRINT and at least one source where books can be purchased

7. Other considerations:

books found in SCHOOL DISTRICT LITERATURE GUIDE

books adapted to film or video format as listed in the State Film Catalog

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT QUESTIONS:

Af ter the booklist is finalized by the committee, questions are assigned to individuals or groups to prepare. Questions must be submitted to the designated "clearing house" so that they can be duplicated and distributed. Questions must be submitted on the form included in this article and should be prepared with dedication to the following list of requirements:

begin each question with "In what book...".

use present tense and correct grammar.

below each question type the title and author's name as they appear on the title page of your edition of the book. This will then become the "official" title and author for that book.

include below the title and author the page number where the answer can be found.

omit using names of characters.

omit using words from the title.

avoid obvious questions.

eliminate (if possible) questions that can be answered by more than one title.

write at least 48 questions for each title.

select the BEST 16 questions for STATE battles; type these on two separate pages and clearly STAR EACH QUESTION.

submit two more pages of questions for school and practice battles and mark EACH QUESTIONS WITH A "P".

submit questions only on WHITE paper.

select the "next best" 16 questions for DISTRICT battles.

consider that copying sometimes "muddles" the edges when you set your margins; two separate pages and clearly mark EACH QUESTIONS WITH A "D".

now look back over every question you have written to make sure you have met the criteria (are they clear, concise, correct?).

All participants in the Battle of the books program utilize the questions prepared around the state. Please remember that the QUALITY of questions is important to good battles.

Also, please change questions you receive that you believe are poor, unclear, have duplicate answers, or that you may need to use again in other battles. Sometimes the alteration of a word or phrase, or the deletion of a word or phrase, can give you numerous new yet still valid questions. Poor questions should be brought to the attention of the committee chairman in writing as soon as possible for elimination from the battles.

With the "What to Know About Questions" guidelines in place your completed sets of questions (one set for practice battles, one set for school and district competition and a set of questions for state competition should be completed. These questions, one per index card would look like the following:

About Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men

In what book do two characters travel around the country together seeking odd jobs?

Correct Answer: Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

By answering the title correctly students receive 5 points (see score sheet that follows) and by answering the author correctly students receive an additional 3 points. A match is ten questions and the score is tallied after that number of questions has been read. The score sheet is drawn up to accommodate until breaking questions as they are needed. For competition a round robin bracket is drawn up with the last team remaining undefeated as the winner.

SCORE SHEET

ALASKA BATTLE OF THE BOOKS

BRACKET NUMBER:

INSTRUCTIONS: Circle each point as scored (5 pts. for correct title, 3 bonus pts for author). Cross out those points not earned. Team C column will be used for 3-way play-offs only.

TEAM A:
TEAM B:
TEAM C:

ROUND	TEAM A	TEAM B	TEAM C
1	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
2	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
3	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
4	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
5	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
Half-time:			
6	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
7	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
8	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
9	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
10	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
11*	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
12*	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
13*	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
14*	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
15*	5 / 3	5 / 3	5 / 3
Final Score:	_____	_____	_____

*Tie breakers, if needed; score as in regular rounds.

HOW TO DO BATTLE

For every battle you hold, have on hand the following items:

packet of questions (you may want to pencil "1A", "1B", "2B", etc on the cards).

for your convenience, slip in a card marked "half-time" after 5 questions.

attach, or have handy, extra questions should you need to delete a few or go on to tiebreakers.

a copy of the OFFICIAL BOOKLIST.

a copy of the RULES (memorize these!).

a score sheet (an example is inserted).

a stop watch for keeping time.

adult helpers.

You should also establish some consistent and FAIR method for determining which team will be team A and which will be team B: toss a coin, draw straws, draw numbers. In state and possibly your own district battles, tournament bracketing will be pre-set and will determine which teams are A and B (with A being the top team in the bracket and B being the bottom team in the bracket).

You should allow 30 minutes for a battle, although most do not take the full allotment of time. Read through the questions you will use PRIOR TO BATTLES (particularly during state audio conference competition), as the extra time you take can prevent problems, confusion, and challenges.

You should make certain that all judges, scorers, timers, and questioners you involve to help with the battles receive GOOD training prior to battle time so that no unfortunate errors are made during the competition.

THERE IS NO ONE WAY TO HOLD BUILDING OR DISTRICT COMPETITIONS!!! The state schedule will be set by the Battle of the Books Committee, and that tournament will be held with strict adherence to the RULES and the OFFICIAL BOOKLIST. However, you building and/or district competitions can be organized as you wish. Some examples: hold elimination battles in round robins, single eliminations, double eliminations, classroom finals and then a tournament. Some schools have held their schools finals in private, others before a classroom, others during an assembly, and still others invite parents. In larger districts the winners from each building and at each grade level, met with the community, parents, and local media on hand, for tournaments. Other districts met over the Learn/Alaska audio conference network for their finals.

HOW TO PROMOTE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS

A wide variety of ideas have been submitted for promoting the program and motivating students to read. Several ideas are included in the handbook, and others are outlined below.

Perhaps the most frequently mentioned method of motivating students was use of the video recordings from battles in previous years.

If this is your first year with the Battle of the Books program begin having students make videos of themselves and share them with other groups.

Other Valuable Suggestions and Ideas Include:

get video or film versions of many books from the State Film Library (use fiche catalog).

purchase filmstrip versions of the books.

do group orientations for students, staff and parents.

do book talks using Battle books.

make bookmarks from each level's official booklist.

have bookmark contest with students.

make visible displays or bulletin boards publicizing the program.

saturate school bulletins, district newsletters and other handouts with program information.

encourage teachers to read books or portions of books aloud to students.

hold contests to redesign book covers, design a school logo for Battle of the Books, prepare the toughest questions, etc.

have students create large posters of book covers to display.

have a variety of study guides or literature units ready including games, crossword puzzles, "first line" quizzes.

create a large display including title/author lists participants names, and place the chart each student's progress.

The list is only limited by your own creativity and time! Students who participate in the Battle of the Books are generally easy to motivate and enthusiastic.

DO NOT FORGET TO SAVE EVERYTHING YOU DO FOR NEXT YEAR!

HOW TO MAKE PUBLIC RELATIONS

The real key to a publicity campaign is planning. Keep a schedule or time line for yourself as a reminder of when to notify the parents of impending competitions, when to call the media, when to submit newsletters for district publications, when to bring in your camera to record momentous events, etc.

Local newspaper, local radio and television stations, as well as statewide publications, are anxious to read/hear about what is occurring in the schools. If you have to take the pictures and write the articles yourself, or if you have to record the interviews, or set up the video gear yourself, it will be worth the effort to expose more people to the Battle of the books program. Communicating with the parents and the community about this popular school program will also open up channels that can be later utilized when vital support may be needed.

In Alaska many really good publicity campaigns are taking place already. Metlakatla did a presentation on Battle of the Books for open house. Juneau gets local merchants to display not

only the books, but also the rules and prizes. Yukon/Koyukuk is building a program for K-12 with Caldecotts and easy books (list and questions available upon request) - so not one child district wide is denied the opportunity to participate in the program! Kodiak sends out regular letters to parents, as well as news releases. Many districts make a point of sending individual invitations to board and city council members for Battle of the Books finals in their communities.

The state coordinator will be keeping historical data and will be in contact with the media. Please send good black and white photographs as well as local news reports for the coordinator for use in statewide publicity.

Just remember to COMMUNICATE often with those around you who might otherwise miss out on important Battle events. Next, SAVE EVERYTHING YOU DO, every invitation you send, every letter home, every news item, every photo you take, every time line you prepare for yourself. You may wish to re-use items or remind yourself about ideas from year to year!

USING THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS CONTEST AS THE FOCUS OF YOUR LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM

We teach students to read so that they can become life long readers and lovers of books. Using the Battle of the Books program as the core of your classroom reading program can help you to assist students in: learning grammar, improving their writing skills and developing a love for reading. Many of the books you select could have a science or social studies theme and therefore could be read in the content area.

By having students critically analyze the book selections students can have all of their classroom writing assignments (from fast writes to publishing stage) revolve around work with these books. In Southwest Region Schools we have developed dozens of projects that accompany the reading of the Battle of the Books selections. These projects range from plotting the settings of the stories on a world map to rewriting the story scripts so that they might have different endings. The opportunities are endless.

IN CONCLUSION

Participants around the state have given the Battle of the Books program rave reviews. Students return year after year to participate. Students hang in there from December until April reading good books. And, most conclusively, teachers and librarians around the state take on the great responsibility year after year of implementing the program.

Community members, parents and media are attending battles; entire villages participate in fund raising activities to cover the cost of purchasing books; parents call in the spring to get the book list for the upcoming year so that summer reading for their children can be planned. Battle of the Books builds love of reading, so give Battle of the Books a try in your school or community.

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